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## Highway 14 group to keep pressure on state

February 15, 2014

By Kevin Sweeney - Journal Editor , The Journal

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NEW ULM - New Ulm Mayor Bob Beussman knows the Highway 14 Partnership is getting through to legislators.

"We've walked into legislators offices to talk to them about Highway 14 and they say, 'Are you guys here again?'" Beussman said with a smile Friday. Keeping the pressure on the state to complete the Highway 14 four-lane expansion all the way to New Ulm is the Highway 14 Partnership's main goal in its "14 in '14" plan of action.

Beussman, is president of the Highway 14 Partnership this year, and Audra Shaneman, president of the New Ulm Area Chamber of Commerce is on the board. They, along with Amanda Duerr, a lobbyist with the Partnership talked about plans for the coming year in an interview on Friday.

The Highway 14 Partnership is a coalition of cities and counties and business leaders along the Highway 14 corridor. Its goal is to expand the highway to four lanes all the way from Rochester to New Ulm.

The coalition was happy in 2013 with the passage of the state Corridors of Commerce program, said Duerr.

"We were pleased that we were the only project in the state to have three of its sections included in the plan," she said. The North Mankato to Nicollet expansion received \$20 million to \$28 million, and is slated for construction in 2015-16. The Nicollet Bypass is also slated for 2015-16 construction after receiving \$15 to \$25 million in funding, and the Owatonna to Dodge Center "Phase 1" expansion is to receive \$16 to \$20 million and should begin construction this year.

The Corridors of Commerce project, which used \$330 million in trunk highway bonds to finance projects, was a one-time project, and the Department of Transportation has maxed out its bonding authority.

Duerr said the Highway 14 partnership will push legislators this year to provide additional and ongoing funding for the Corridors of Commerce program.

"It's nice that the Legislature did recognize that transportation is an important component in commerce," said Duerr. "If a four-lane highway is completed to New Ulm, and New Ulm does attract a new business or industry because of it, it will mean more jobs, more income, and more taxes being paid to the state."

In addition to pushing for more funding for Corridors of Commerce, the partnership will be working to keep funds already earmarked for the project from being spent elsewhere.

"The North Mankato to Nicollet portion of the project was originally set for 2016-18, with MnDOT setting aside \$19 million for it. Now that Corridors of Commerce has moved that up to 2015-16, we want to make sure that the \$19 million originally set aside will be used for other Highway 14 needs," said Duerr.

The Highway 14 Partnership has been around a long time, and is considered one of the top transportation advocacy groups in the state. Duerr said the coalition hasn't lost membership as various communities get their portions of the project completed, but is actually gaining three more communities this year.

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"I think members realize that everyone pulling together has made the group effective, and other communities are attracted by the success we've been having," she said.

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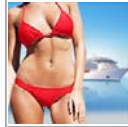
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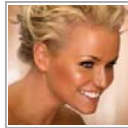
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